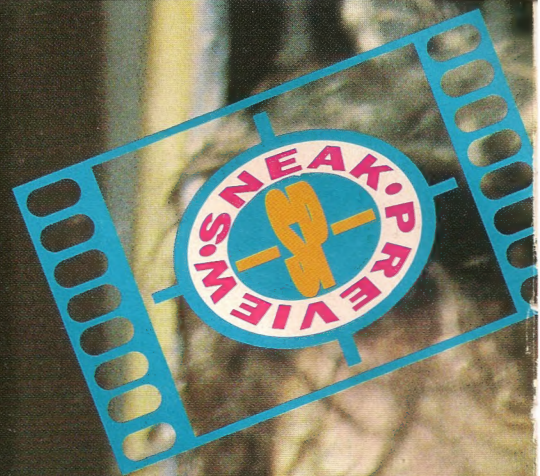


Proving that *Video World* readers are ahead of their time, you've been asking for info on movies not yet on the big screen let alone on video! As ever, your wish is our command and this month, in the first of a series of sneak previews, we're giving you the rundown on the new ***Night Of The Living Dead*** and it's all in glorious living(!) colour.



Twenty three years ago an unknown Pittsburgh-based industrial film-maker named George Romero stunned the world with *The Night Of The Living Dead*, one of the most terrifying pictures ever to hit the screens of American drive-ins. Produced for less than \$150,000 and shot in grainy black and white, it quickly outgrew its humble origins to become one of the most successful independent films ever made. It's now regarded as a milestone in the genre. The film's premise was simple. Seven people barricade themselves in a remote Pennsylvania farmhouse, while an army of flesh-eating zombies roam the countryside. But from this premise sprang an important, masterfully executed, exercise in horror. The film also worked as a bleak allegory on late 60s America, with the coloured hero surviving the night of horror only to be senselessly destroyed by a redneck posse - 'Good shot! That's another one for the fire...'

This year George Romero's flesh-eating zombies will be stalking the screen once more in a colour re-make directed by superstar make-up man Tom Savini. At \$8.4 million the new *Night Of The Living Dead* costs approximately 40 times the original, otherwise it's the mixture as before - the 1968 film repackaged by many of the original participants. George Romero wrote the updated script and acts as executive producer, and he recently told *Video World* that his interest in the re-make was 'purely financial.' According to gory George, 'We all got ripped off first time around. I'm very sympathetic to the idea of the investors on that film who have a stake in the new movie, finally getting some money. If the re-make can help that, then that's great.' Romero is also grateful for the chance that the new movie has given him to correct what he sees as a mistake in the original. Says George: 'In the first film, the radiation scenario was the only

explanation offered for the dead coming to life, so that's the one that is always given. That was my biggest pet peeve about the original film, because I didn't think it needed an explanation: I don't care why the dead are coming back to life, just lemme out of here! So in this film we offer several explanations with a clear understanding that the people offering them don't know any more than you do. It's just speculation and confusion.'

Having had quite enough of directing zombies in *Night Of The Living Dead's* gut-crunching sequels, *Dawn* and *Day Of The Dead*, Romero was content to let his long-time collaborator Tom Savini take the reins of the re-make. Savini says that he and Romero first met back in 1967 when the former was at college. 'I remember walking into George's office and trying to persuade him to let me work on the special effects for the first *Night Of The Living Dead*. But before anything could happen I was drafted to fight in Vietnam. So when George suggested I direct this new version, I was up on cloud nine!'

Of course Savini was aware right from the very beginning that the original movie would be a tough act to follow. 'Somebody wrote recently that "Tom Savini was ill-advised to do the re-make of *Night Of The Living Dead*", he smiles. Well I just don't buy that, did anyone say the re-make of *The Thing* was ill-advised? To me, that re-make was a great movie it's one of my top ten favourites. And besides, I do not consider this picture a re-make. I think of it a re-telling of the story. We are twisting and turning things around....'

Most certainly twisted are the film's grisly special effects, which were provided by up and coming young make-up experts, Tom Vulich and Everett Burrell. The talented twosome had previously assisted Savini on the George Romero/Dario Argento collaboration, *Two Evil Eyes* and



THE NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD



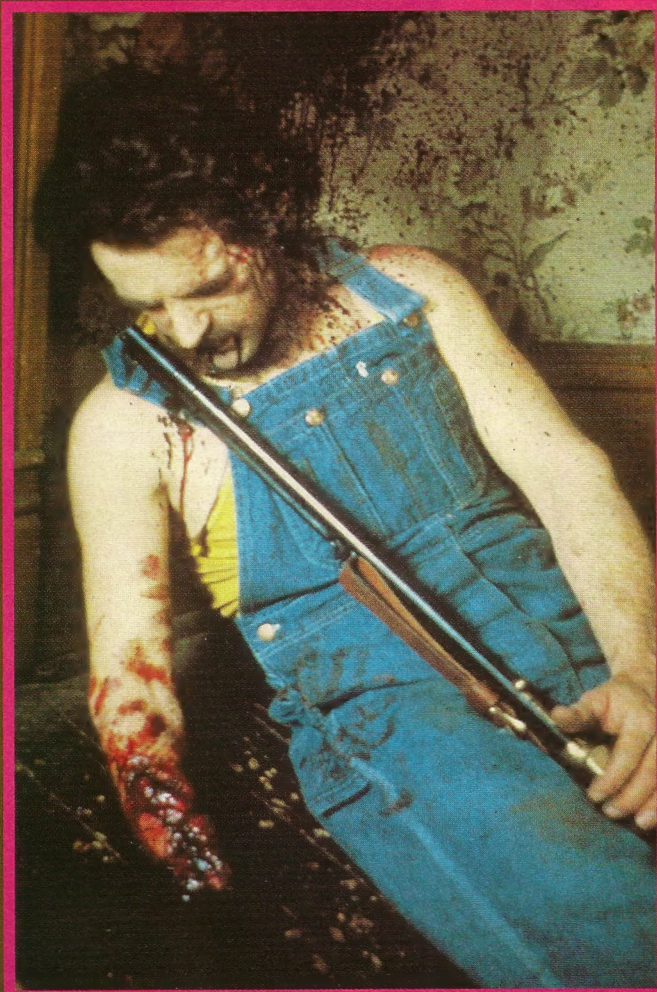
are currently working on the effects for the new Romero/Stephen King flick, *The Dark Half*.

'It was weird to give up control over the effects,' smiles Savini. 'But at least I could go home at night without having blood all over me!' According to Tom Vulich, he and Burrell wanted to bring a greater realism to the zombies in this movie. 'We examined everything we could find that depicted death and near-death. We collected morgue photos and pathology texts, Everett watched an autopsy and stood two or three feet from a real body being cut up, we even looked at films of concentration camp victims, because the way they looked is as close to the living dead as you can get.

'That was mentioned in an article in the *Los Angeles Times* and we were lambasted by people who wrote in to say we were creeps. But we never took what we were doing frivolously; Everett and I are serious about what we do and we wanted our work to be as accurate as possible. Some of the research was certainly distasteful and I can see why it would upset people, but we felt it was important to get it right. For instance, we noticed that corpses have this yellowish colour - not grey, the way most people do it. And we noticed that noses and ears

seem to look larger, I guess because they are made of cartilage and don't shrink as much as the rest. So we made the zombies' ears and noses slightly oversized. We were very careful about the blood; we didn't just use your basic red and splatter it all over the place. Most of the zombies have brownish blood because we figured they'd been walking around for a few days and it would be coagulated. We also used a kind of

One of the film's most potent effects involves a zombie who is hit by Ben's truck and continues to crawl with a broken back. 'That guy was very weird-looking,' explains Vulich. He wasn't wearing any special make-up, except what was needed for the physical effect. He didn't have any sweat glands and the condition deformed his head. For the gag, he was in a pit with a fake body attached below the waist. He just moved his arms



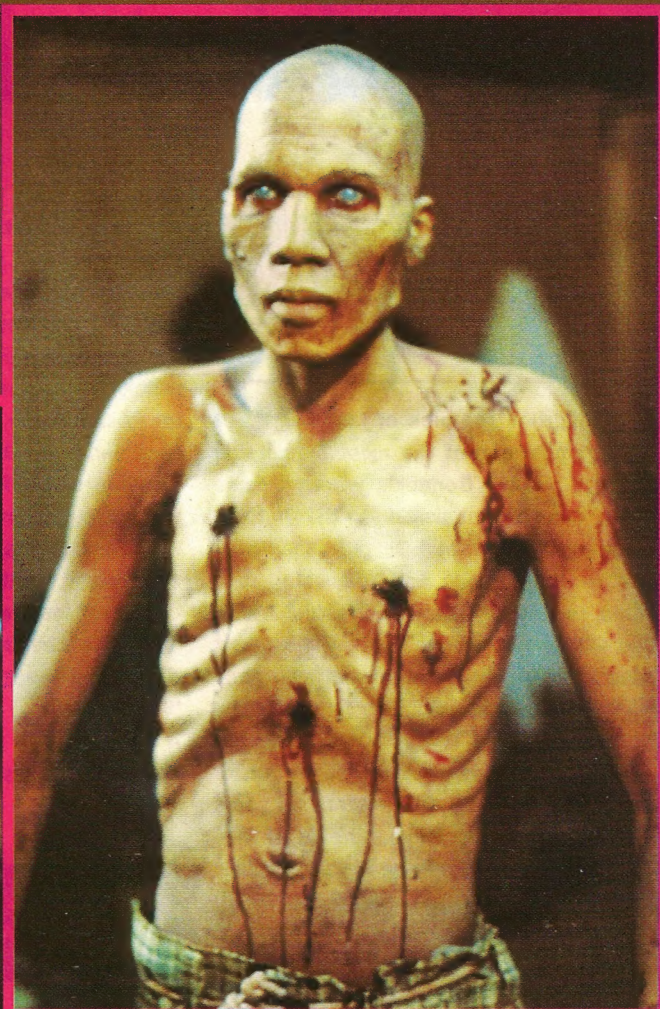
yellowish liquid for plasma fluid. We had bottles of the most disgusting things with us at all times.'

as though he was trying to crawl, and the effects crew manipulated the torso and legs.'

In conclusion, Tom Savini stresses that it was important to him to remain faithful to

the original while still trying to find new twists in the material. 'I have a great deal of respect for the first film and I have tried to show that throughout the remake. The stills at the end, the trowel in the basement, Johnny saying that line: "They're coming to get you Barbara" while the screen is still black, before the film has even begun... those are all references to the original film that I included as a way of showing respect for

whenever you saw black and white it would tip you off that the zombies were watching, and it would be a reference to the first film as well. But we abandoned that idea because we reasoned that if you had identifiable



we showed the zombie eyes. You've heard that the eyes are the windows of the soul. Almost every time you see a zombie in close-up, the eyes are obscured. There's a film over them, they're hidden in shadow, or they are damaged in some way. I felt that if you could never get a good look into their eyes, then it would reinforce the fact that they're dead. Before *Night Of The Living Dead*, zombies were just walking corpses, once in a while you had a big strong one who would strangle somebody, but basically they weren't all that menacing. The twist we gave them was that they were flesh-eaters and that seemed to stick. Now zombies are a staple of horror movies, just like Frankenstein's monster, vampires and werewolves. The key to these movies is death. You're afraid that your uncle might die. But now you're afraid that he might die and come back and make you a zombie. Everybody is afraid of death, and these movies take it one step further.'

what George and the rest of them did. I had also intended to make shots from the zombies' point of view in black and white. I thought it would be a useful device for generating suspense, because

zombie points of view then it would help make them into entities with whom you could emphasise, not the dead sharks encircling you.'

We were also very careful about the way

***Night Of The Living Dead* opens at cinemas in the UK this July, and will be available on video later in the year. Meanwhile, send your Sneak Preview requests to us at the usual address and we'll see what we can do.**